Appendix A: Timeline of Canon, Councils, and Translation

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How Power, Politics, and Interpretation Shaped the Christian Scriptures

UNGERE LECTULUM
SAPIENTIA COMPOSITIO
LIBRI CURSA IN ILLIUM
DOCTUS PLURIME LINGUA
EXPRIMA QUERELAS
SUNT NULLA TIBI OPERA
INCINCIRE ALIQUID
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STUDII INCUMANDI IN TE
DURARE STUDIOSUM

KEVIN L. MEYER

A comprehensive reference timeline of the major events that shaped the Bible's form and authority—from ancient scrolls to digital discoveries.

Canonical Comparison Chart

Tradition	Books	Key Texts	Distinctive Features
Jewish (Tanakh)	24	Torah, Nevi'im, Ketuvim	Hebrew canon, established c. 90-200 CE
Roman Catholic	73	Includes Deuterocanonical books	Affirmed at Trent (1546)
Eastern Orthodox	76-77	Prayer of Manasseh, Psalm 151	Varies by national church
Protestant	66	Excludes Deuterocanonical books	Westminster Confession (1646)
Ethiopian Orthodox	81	Enoch, Jubilees, Meqabyan	Oldest independent canon
Armenian Orthodox	76+	3 Corinthians, expanded Sirach	Distinctive arrangement
Latter-day Saints	66+	Book of Mormon, D&C, Pearl of Great Price	Open, expanding canon

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Timeline

Before the Common Era (BCE)

c. 1200-500 BCE — Core texts of the Hebrew Bible (Torah, historical books, early prophetic writings) are composed through oral tradition and written compilation across several centuries.

c. 250-50 BCE — Septuagint (LXX) translation of Hebrew Scriptures into Greek in Alexandria. Includes books later excluded from Jewish and Protestant canons (Wisdom, Sirach, 1-2 Maccabees, additions to Esther and Daniel).

> *Key Impact*: Creates broader canon that influences early Christianity

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1st-3rd Century CE: Early Christian Formation

c. 30-100 CE — Jesus' ministry and composition of New Testament texts (Pauline letters, Gospels, Acts, Revelation, Catholic Epistles).

c. 90 CE — Council of Jamnia (traditionally dated, though modern scholars

question its historical significance as a formal canon-setting council). Represents period of rabbinic discussion about Hebrew biblical boundaries.

> *Note*: Recent scholarship views this as gradual consensus-building rather than formal conciliar decision

2nd century CE — Diverse Christian texts circulate: *Shepherd of Hermas*, *Gospel of Thomas*, *Infancy Gospel of James*, *Acts of Paul and Thecla*, *Didache*. No unified New Testament canon exists.

c. 140 CE — **Marcion** creates truncated canon (Luke + 10 Pauline letters), forcing mainstream Christianity to articulate broader scriptural collections.

c. 180 CE — **Irenaeus of Lyon** argues for fourfold Gospel collection (Matthew, Mark, Luke, John), establishing precedent for Gospel canon.

c. 200 CE — **Muratorian Fragment** preserves early canonical list including some texts later excluded (Apocalypse of Peter) while omitting others later accepted (Hebrews, James).

4th-5th Century: Imperial Christianity and Canon Formation

313 CE — **Edict of Milan** legalizes Christianity in Roman Empire, beginning period of institutional consolidation.

325 CE — **Council of Nicaea** affirms Christ's divinity and consubstantiality but does not address canonical questions.

367 CE — **Athanasius of Alexandria** issues first known list matching exactly the modern 27-book New Testament canon in his 39th Festal Letter.

> "*Let no man add to these, neither let him take ought from these*"

382 CE — **Council of Rome** (under Pope Damasus) affirms New Testament canon and includes Deuterocanonical books in Old Testament.

393 CE — **Council of Hippo** confirms canon including Deuterocanonical books for Western Christianity.

397 CE — **Council of Carthage** reaffirms Hippo's canonical decisions; becomes highly influential in shaping Western church practice.

c. 405 CE — **Jerome completes Latin Vulgate**, translating from Hebrew and Greek sources. Notably expresses reservations about Deuterocanonical books

while including them.

> *Personal tension*: Jerome preferred Hebrew sources but yielded to church authority

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Middle Ages: Manuscript Transmission and Regional Diversity

500-1500 CE — Latin Vulgate dominates Western Christianity while diverse manuscript traditions continue in Eastern, Oriental, and African churches (Syriac Peshitta, Armenian Bible, Ethiopian Orthodox collection).

c. 680 CE — Synod of Whitby aligns British Christianity with Roman ecclesiastical customs and authority structures.

1380s — John Wycliffe's followers produce first complete English Bible translated from Latin Vulgate rather than original languages.

> *Innovation*: First systematic attempt at vernacular Bible in English

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Reformation and Confessional Period: Print Revolution

1454 CE — Gutenberg Bible represents first mass-produced printed Bible (Latin Vulgate), revolutionizing textual standardization and distribution.

1516 CE — Erasmus publishes Textus Receptus, first printed Greek New Testament, though hastily compiled from late medieval manuscripts.

> *Historical irony*: Flawed text becomes Protestant standard for centuries

1522-1534 CE — Martin Luther's German Bible excludes Deuterocanonical books from Old Testament proper, placing them in separate "Apocrypha" section.

> *Theological rationale*: "These books are not held equal to the sacred Scriptures, but are useful and good to read"

1525 CE — William Tyndale's New Testament introduces distinctive English vocabulary that influences all subsequent English translations.

1534 CE — Miles Coverdale completes first full English Bible, combining Tyndale's work with Latin and German sources.

1546 CE — Council of Trent definitively affirms Catholic canon including Deuterocanonical books with anathema against rejection.

> *Counter-Reformation response*: Explicit rejection of Protestant canonical limitations

1611 CE — King James Version published with Apocrypha included in separate section between Old and New Testaments.

> *Anglican compromise*: Deuterocanonical books present but distinguished from canonical texts

1646 CE — Westminster Confession of Faith establishes 66-book Protestant canon as normative for Reformed churches, explicitly excluding Apocrypha from scriptural authority.

Modern Period: Discovery and Technological Revolution

1823-1830 CE — Joseph Smith reports discovering golden plates (1823), later published as **Book of Mormon** (1830). Establishes open, expanding canonical tradition for Latter-day Saints alongside Bible, *Doctrine and Covenants*, and *Pearl of Great Price*.

> *Distinctive feature*: Only major modern tradition with formally open canon

1881-1885 CE — Revised Version updates King James Bible using earlier Greek manuscripts discovered since 1611, beginning modern era of textually-informed translation.

1945 CE — Nag Hammadi Library discovered in Egypt, including *Gospel of Thomas*, *Gospel of Mary*, *Thunder Perfect Mind*, and other early Christian texts excluded from canonical formation.

> *Scholarly revolution*: Reveals diversity of early Christian theological expression

1947-1956 CE — Dead Sea Scrolls discovered at Qumran, preserving ancient Hebrew manuscripts and sectarian writings that illuminate Second Temple Judaism and early Christian context.

Textual revelation: Demonstrates biblical fluidity before canonical standardization

1965-1975 CE — Second Vatican Council and subsequent developments encourage Catholic biblical scholarship using historical-critical methods previously associated with Protestant academia.

2000s CE — Digital manuscript projects begin providing global access to primary sources: Digital Dead Sea Scrolls, Codex Sinaiticus Project, New Testament Virtual Manuscript Room.

2010s-2020s CE — Artificial intelligence and advanced imaging transform manuscript analysis:

- **Multispectral imaging** recovers erased palimpsest texts
- **Virtual unwrapping** reads damaged scrolls (Ein Gedi Scroll, 2015)
- **Machine learning** identifies individual scribes and textual patterns
- **AI translation modeling** reveals bias and inconsistency in traditional renderings
- **Crowdsourced transcription** democratizes scholarly participation

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Glossary of Key Terms

Apocrypha: Books included in some Christian canons but not others; from Greek "hidden" or "secret"

Canon: Authoritative collection of sacred texts; from Greek "rule" or "standard"

Codex: Bound book format that replaced scroll format in early Christianity

Deuterocanonical: "Second canon" books accepted by Catholics and Orthodox but rejected by Protestants

Manuscript: Hand-written document, as opposed to printed text

Palimpsest: Manuscript where original text was erased and overwritten, often preserving earlier texts beneath later writing

Peshitta: Standard Syriac Bible translation, meaning "simple" or "common"

Septuagint (LXX): Greek translation of Hebrew Bible, foundational for early Christianity

Textus Receptus: "Received Text," Erasmus's printed Greek New Testament that

became Protestant standard

Vulgate: Jerome's Latin translation, standard for Western Christianity 400-1500 CE

Major Digital Resources for Continued Exploration

Primary Manuscript Collections:

- Digital Dead Sea Scrolls: www.deadseascrolls.org.il
- Codex Sinaiticus Project: www.codexsinaiticus.org
- New Testament Virtual Manuscript Room: ntvmr.uni-muenster.de

Alternative Text Collections:

- Early Christian Writings: www.earlychristianwritings.com
- Nag Hammadi Library: www.gnosis.org/naghamm/nhl.html
- Christian Apocrypha: www.christianapocrypha.org

Scholarly Databases:

- Society of Biblical Literature: www.sbl-site.org
- Center for the Study of New Testament Manuscripts: www.csntm.org
- Westar Institute: www.westarinstitute.org

Interfaith Resources:

- Comparative Religion: www.religionfacts.com
- Academic study of world scriptures and canonical traditions across religious boundaries

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Note on Dates and Scholarly Consensus

Many dates in ancient history involve scholarly approximation rather than precise documentation. This timeline reflects current academic consensus while acknowledging ongoing debates about specific chronologies, particularly regarding:

- Hebrew Bible composition dates (ongoing archaeological and literary analysis)
- New Testament dating (scholarly range typically 50-150 CE for most texts)

- Council proceedings (records often incomplete or later reconstructed)
- Manuscript traditions (dating methods continue improving through scientific analysis)

Readers interested in specific dating questions should consult current scholarly literature, as archaeological discoveries and analytical methods continue refining historical understanding.

Original Link: https://www.sacrededitors.com/christianity-appendix-a/